

of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

## Remarks Honoring the Points of Light Institute January 7, 2009

Thank you all. Mr. President—[laughter]—yes? No—[laughter]. Thank you all for coming. I'm told there is seven speakers. So there's now about to be six. I thank you for—I welcome you to the White House. I hope you take advantage of the reception that we have after these seven short speeches. And I want to thank you for your compassion.

The strength of America is not our military, it's not our wallet, it is—lies in the hearts and souls of our citizens, those who hear the universal call to love a neighbor just like they'd like to be loved themselves.

And so for those of you who are rallying the armies of compassion, and encouraging the armies of compassion, we thank you.

And now it is my honor to introduce my brother Neil M. Bush.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:56 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to former President George H.W. Bush. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of former President Bush.

## Remarks on the No Child Left Behind Act in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania January 8, 2009

*The President.* Thank you for the warm welcome. And Laura and I are thrilled to be here at Kearny School. We have come because this is one of the really fine schools in the city of Philadelphia. We bring greetings from the Nation's Capital, but more importantly, we bring appreciation for those who are working so hard to make sure that every child can learn.

You know, 7 years ago today, I had the honor of signing a bill that forever changed America's school systems. It was called the No Child Left Behind Act. I firmly believe that thanks to this law, more students are learning, an achievement gap is closing. And on this anniversary, I have come to talk about why we need to keep the law strong. If you find a piece of legislation that is working, it is important to make

sure the underpinnings of that law remain strong.

I do want to thank Laura for joining me. She has been an awesome wife and a great First Lady. Our journey together in Washington has been fantastic, and I thank her very much for her love.

I am proud to be here with Arlene Ackerman. Thank you for your introduction, Arlene, and thank you for being—[applause]. Arlene is a reform-minded leader. And by that, I mean you have a superintendent here who is willing to challenge the status quo if the status quo is unacceptable. Sometimes that's hard in public life. You see the status quo, and people are saying, "Oh, let's just leave it the way it is, it's too hard to change." And you have a superintendent here that says, "If we're finding failure, we're going to change." And

I want to thank you for taking on this important assignment.

I'm proud to be here with my buddy. I guess it's okay to call the Secretary of Education your buddy; that means friend. And she has been our friend for a long time. She is a great Secretary of Education. And, Margaret, I want to thank you for being here.

I want to thank the senior Senator—I guess it's okay to call you senior—Arlen Specter. He is a good friend, and he cares a lot about the State of Pennsylvania and the education systems in the State. So thank you for coming, my friend.

Jerry Zahorchak is with us, the Pennsylvania Department of Education Secretary. Jerry, thank you for being here, and thank you for serving.

I want to thank all the State and local officials; particularly, the State representative from this district has kindly come by to say hello and participate in a roundtable we just had.

Roy Romer, former Governor of Colorado, and an education reformer, has just spoken, and I want to thank Roy. He happens to be the chairman of Strong American Schools. It's got a nice ring to it, doesn't it? Strong American Schools. That means schools that actually teach people how to read, write, and add and subtract. At least that's my definition of strong American schools.

I want to thank very much the Reverend Al Sharpton. Now, some of you are probably about to fall out of your chair—[*laughter*]*—*when you know that Al and I have found common ground. And by the way, it's on an important issue. See, he cares just as much as I care about making sure every child learns to read, write, and add and subtract. And I want to thank you for your leadership on this issue, and I appreciate you being here.

I want to thank the teachers who work here. I particularly want to thank Principal Spagnola for her leadership. And the thing about educators, first of all, every good

school has got a principal who is a good principal. That's generally the key ingredient to success, somebody who can set high standards and motivate. And this principal can do just that.

And for the teachers, thank you for taking on a noble profession. Laura and I are proud to report that one of our daughters is a teacher, and it makes us feel just incredibly great to know that we've raised a child who is willing to take on an important task of teaching a child to be able to have the skills necessary to succeed in life.

There are a lot of reformers here, and I welcome the reformers. These are people from society who say, "I want to help the school system succeed." When I got off Air Force One today, I met Adam Bruckner. I mentioned to some kids, "Have you ever heard of Adam Bruckner?" And they said, "You're talking about Mr. Adam." I said, "That's who I'm talking about." He is volunteer; he's a mentor. He happens to be a professional soccer coach, which means he knows how to play soccer, and he is willing to lend his skills and, more importantly, his heart, to teach a child the beauty of being a sports person and the lessons of life that come from good competition.

And so I want to thank you very much, Adam, for being here and representing all the folks who volunteer at this program.

At the end of the Presidency, you get to do a lot of lasts. I don't know if you saw on TV, but I pardoned my last Thanksgiving turkey. [*Laughter*] This is my last policy speech. As President of the United States, this is the last policy address I will give. What makes it interesting is that it's the same subject of my first policy address as President of the United States, which is education and education reform.

I hope you can tell that education is dear to my heart. I care a lot about whether or not our children can learn to read, write, and add and subtract. When I was a Governor of Texas, I didn't like it one bit when

I'd go to schools in my State and realize that children were not learning so they could realize their God-given potential. I didn't like it because I knew the future of our society depended upon a good, sound education.

I was sharing this story with people that Laura and I just met with, and at the time I went to a high school in my State, one of our big city high schools. And I said, "Man, thanks for teaching." I met this teacher. I think his name is Brown, if I'm not mistaken—

*Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings.* Nelson Brown.

*The President.* —Nelson Brown—and he taught geography and history, if I'm not mistaken. I said, "How is it going, Mr. Brown?" He said, "It's going lousy." I said, "Why?" He said, "Because my kids cannot read, and they're in high school." You see, the system was just satisfied with just shuffling kids through: If you're 14, you're supposed to be here; if you're 16, you're supposed to be there. Rarely was the question asked: Can you read? Or can you write? Or can you add and can you subtract?

And so we decided to do something about it. We said such a system is unacceptable to the future of our State. And that's the spirit we brought to Washington, DC. It's unacceptable to our country that vulnerable children slip through the cracks. And by the way, guess who generally those children are? They happen to be inner-city kids, or children whose parents don't speak English as a first language. They're the easiest children to forget about.

We saw a culture of low expectations. You know what happens when you have low expectations? You get lousy results. And when you get lousy results, you have people who say, "There's no future for me in this country."

And so we decided to do something about it. We accepted the responsibility of the office to which I had been elected. It starts with this concept: Every child can learn. We believe that it is important to

have a high quality education if you're—one is going to succeed in the 21st century. It's no longer acceptable to be cranking people out of the school system and saying, "Okay, just go—you know, you can make a living just through manual labor alone." That's going to happen for some, but it's not the future of America, if we want to be a competitive nation as we head into the 21st century.

We believe that every child has dignity and worth. But it wasn't just me who believed that. Fortunately, when we got to Washington, a lot of other people believed it, Democrats and Republicans. I know there's a lot of talk about how Washington is divided, and it has been at times, at times. And it can get awfully ugly in Washington. But nevertheless, if you look at the history over the past 8 years, there have been moments where we have come together. And the No Child Left Behind Act is one such moment.

It gives me a chance now to thank Senator Kennedy of Massachusetts, Senator Gregg of New Hampshire, Congressman Miller of California, Congressman Boehner of Ohio, Republicans and Democrats who worked together to get this piece of legislation passed. I believe that in signing that bill we enacted the most sweeping education reforms in a long, long time.

The philosophy behind the law is pretty straightforward: Local schools remain under local control. In exchange for Federal dollars, however, we expect results. We're spending money on schools, and shouldn't we determine whether or not the money we're spending is yielding the results society expects?

So States set standards. One reason this school makes sense is because you have a principal who sets high standards, keeps that bar high. And we hold schools accountable for meeting the standards. There—we set an historic goal that—and that is to—every child should learn to read and do math at grade level by 2014.

The key to measuring is to test. And by the way, I've heard every excuse in the book why we should not test: "Oh, there's too many tests; you teach the test; testing is intrusive; testing is not the role of government." How can you possibly determine whether a child can read at grade level if you don't test? And for those who claim we're teaching the test, uh-uh. We're teaching a child to read so he or she can pass the test.

Testing is important to solve problems. You can't solve them unless you diagnose the problem in the first place. Testing is important to make sure children don't slip too far behind. The facts are, if you get too far behind in reading, for example, it's nearly impossible to catch up. That's why it's important to test early.

Measuring results allows us to focus resources on children who need extra help. And measuring gives parents something to compare other schools with. You oftentimes hear, "Oh, gosh, I wish parents were more involved." Well, one way to get parental involvement is to post results. Nothing will get a parent's attention more than if he or she sees that the school her child goes to isn't performing as well as the school around the corner.

Measurement is essential to success. When schools fall short of standards year after year, something has to happen. In other words, there has to be a consequence in order for there to be effective reforms. And one such thing that can happen is parents can enroll their children in another school. It's—to me, measurement is the gateway to true reform, and measurement is the best way to ensure parental involvement.

By the way, school choice was only open to rich people up until No Child Left Behind. It's hard for a lot of parents to be able to afford to go to any other kind of school but their neighborhood school. And now, under this system, if your public school is failing, you'll have the option of transferring to another public school or

charter school. And it's—I view that as liberation; I view that as empowerment.

There's been a lot of debates about the requirements of No Child Left Behind. No question, a piece of legislation like this encourages debate, and that's fine. That's part of the democratic process. But there is no debate about the results: the first time all 50 States and the District of Columbia have accountability plans in place. The data is being disaggregated. That means that we—instead of just lumping all children together and say, "Oh, isn't everything beautiful," we actually break each child out to determine whether or not he or she is getting the kind of education parents and society expects. And that's an important reform.

Instead of looking the other way when students are falling behind, policymakers at all levels are now beginning to be focused on how to close the achievement gap. Achievement gap is—it means this: White students are reading here, and African American students are reading here, and Latino students are reading down here. And that is unacceptable for the United States of America.

In the classroom, students are learning from highly qualified teachers. In other words, that's part of the reforms of encouraged—the focus on highly qualified teachers. Schools have adopted research-proven strategies for reading instruction. There's a lot of debate, if you follow the public education debates closely, that there's a lot of debate about what's the best kind of reading program as to how to best teach a child to read. Well, when you measure, it helps you determine which system works the best. The principal was describing to us, we're always adjusting and looking to make sure our education is—fits each individual child. In other words, she's constantly analyzing her instruction strategies, and a measurement system allows you to do so.

There's a new Teacher Incentive Fund in place, as a result of No Child Left Behind reforms, and a city like Philadelphia

are rewarding educators for taking jobs in this city's toughest classrooms, and those who are achieving results. In other words, there's an incentive to make sure good teachers get in the classrooms all throughout the city. And by the way, this is happening all across our country.

You know, I mentioned disclosure. More and more districts are producing annual report cards, and that's really important. And I did mention to you what they call supplemental services. Under the No Child Left Behind Act, when you find a disadvantaged child falling behind where he or she should be, there's extra money for tutoring. And across the country there's now about a half a million students benefiting from the tutoring that comes from No Child Left Behind. It makes sense, doesn't it? It says we're going to measure, and if we determine you need extra help, here's some money to help you so that you don't fall behind, so that you catch up.

The number of charter schools, by the way, has more than doubled over the past 7 years. Charter schools provide good outlets. And I met the head of the—president of the charter school association here in Philadelphia. He said 10 years ago there were four, and today there are—yes, a lot. *[Laughter]* When you get over 60, it's hard to hear. *[Laughter]*

The most important result of the No Child Left Behind is this: Fewer students are falling behind; more students are achieving high standards. We have what's called the Nation's Report Card. For those who wonder whether or not we should strengthen No Child Left Behind, I want you to hear this: fourth graders earned the highest reading and math scores in the history of the test. Minority and disadvantaged students made some of the largest gains, with African Americans and Hispanics posting alltime highs in several categories.

No Child Left Behind is working for all kinds of students in all kinds of schools in every part of the country. That is a fact. There's still a long way to go, however.

Secretary Spellings has worked hard to give schools tools and flexibility. She issued new regulations that will reward schools for progress students make from year to year. She helps to provide programs that provide a clear graduation rate. And one of the problems we've had, of course, is getting enough information out in a timely fashion to empower parents to be able to make wise decisions about the future of their children. And she has worked steadily to make sure that information gets to parents in a timely fashion.

Obviously, there's—a piece of legislation like this takes compromise. But there is no compromise to the basic premise of No Child Left Behind, and that is we need to measure on a clear set of goals. We need a few goals that have got maximum impact, and we need to know whether or not those goals are being met. People say, "Can you possibly meet the goal you set?" And the answer is, absolutely can we meet the goals that we've set. And not only is it absolutely—confident we can meet it, I know it is necessary that we do meet those goals.

Laura and I have been privileged to travel to schools over the past 8 years such as this, and you'd be amazed at what we get to see. We get to see hard-working, decent citizens who dedicate their lives to making sure no child is left behind. And we have seen innovators who are willing to try different approaches to achieve the same result. So we went to Harlem to see a school district there. They attend school for 10 hours a day. So the educators, taking advantage of local control, said, "What does it require to make sure that we meet high standards?" In this case, the educators said, "Well, we need to have school 10 hours a day." The teachers give parents their cell phone numbers, so that they can be called anytime. And as the teachers told us, they do get called anytime—*[laughter]*—to help solve problems. I was just thankful that there weren't cell phones when I was going to elementary school. *[Laughter]*

I have seen the resolve for reform and the belief in high standards in Chicago, where reading and math scores are soaring, and where every child still has time to study a foreign language and the fine arts. The school in Chicago we went to, like other schools across the city, have benefited from the vision and leadership of a person named Arne Duncan, and he is going to be the next Secretary of Education. And we are fortunate he has agreed to take on this position. And we wish him all the very best.

Laura and I will never forget the resolve that we saw in New Orleans after Katrina, and the determination by principals and teachers to get their schools up and running. And they did. And by the way, they have placed innovation at the center of a rebuilding school system. They believe in high standards and accountability to make sure that out of the rubble of Katrina comes a world-class education system.

And we've seen the resolve here at Kearny. That's why we're here. Every year—we met a mom, who told us her twins now come to this school. You know, it's interesting what happens when you post scores. Nobody cares more about a child's education, obviously, than the first teacher a child has, which is a parent. And this notion about how parents really don't seem to care, they care, believe me. And when there's transparency in the system it helps them make informed choices. And so mom was saying her twins come here. She also said, by the way, they weren't really reading up to snuff initially, and yet they got extra help. And now guess what? They're reading up to snuff. Kearny School works.

They commute for miles. Some of the families commute for miles because they understand it's a place of excellence. This is a school where a lot of community and faith-based groups come to help. And that is really great of you to do that. And by the way, it happens in other schools too. And if you're interested in how you can serve America, why don't you volunteer in

your local school? If you want to be a member of the army of compassion in America, help your schools. Help your schools help each child realize their God-given potential.

I believe that it is going to be important for our citizens to take a hard look at No Child Left Behind, and listen to the facts of No Child Left Behind, and then say with clear voice, for the sake of our children's future, this good law needs to be strengthened and reauthorized by the United States Congress.

There is a growing consensus across the country that now is not the time to water down standards or to roll back accountability. There is a growing consensus that includes leaders of the business communities across America who see an increasingly global economy and, therefore, believe in standards and accountability. There's a growing consensus amongst leaders of civil rights organizations, like La Raza, and the Urban League, and the Education Equality Project. These leaders refuse to accept what I have called the soft bigotry of low expectations. There's a growing consensus includes a lot of parents, and superintendents, and mayors, and Governors who insist that we put our children first.

And so I've come to herald the success of a good piece of legislation. I have come to talk to our citizens about the results this reform has yielded. And I call upon those who can determine the fate of No Child Left Behind in the future to stay strong in the face of criticism, to not weaken the law—because in weakening the law, you weaken the chance for a child to succeed in America—but to strengthen the law for the sake of every child.

Thank you for letting us come by for the last policy address that we have been honored to make. God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:19 a.m. at General Philip Kearny School. In his remarks, he referred to Arlene C. Ackerman,

superintendent, School District of Philadelphia; political activist Rev. Alfred C. Sharpton, Jr.; Eileen Spagnola, principal, General Philip Kearny School; Adam Bruck-

ner, assistant coach, Major Indoor Soccer League's Philadelphia Kixx; and Lawrence Jones, president, Pennsylvania Coalition for Charter School.

## Statement on the Death of Father Richard John Neuhaus *January 8, 2009*

Laura and I are saddened by the death of Father Richard John Neuhaus. Father Neuhaus was an inspirational leader, admired theologian, and accomplished author who devoted his life to the service of the Almighty and to the betterment of our

world. He was also a dear friend, and I have treasured his wise counsel and guidance.

Our thoughts and prayers are with Father Neuhaus's family, friends, and fellow clergy during this difficult time.

## Statement on Senator Christopher S. "Kit" Bond's Decision Not To Seek Reelection *January 8, 2009*

Senator Kit Bond has been a wonderful public servant and statesman for the people of Missouri. During more than three decades of service as Governor and United States Senator, Kit has been a tireless advocate for our children, our military, and our Nation's intelligence community. He played a vital role in the effort to modernize the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act. Be-

cause of his leadership, we are protecting the liberties of our citizens while gathering vital information we need to prevent attacks on our soil.

I have been honored to work with Senator Bond during my time as President, and Laura and I wish Kit, Linda, and their son Samuel all the best in the future.

## The President's Radio Address *January 10, 2009*

Good morning. This week, I gave my official farewell speech to the men and women of America's Armed Forces in a ceremony at Fort Myer, Virginia. For the past 8 years, I have had no higher honor than serving as the Commander in Chief of these brave patriots. And when Laura and I depart for Texas later this month, we will take with us many inspiring memo-

ries of the valor that we have seen these brave Americans display time and again.

We saw their valor on September the 11th, 2001, in servicemembers rushing into smoke-filled corridors to save their colleagues at the Pentagon and in planes patrolling the skies above New York City and Washington, DC.